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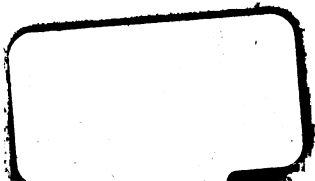
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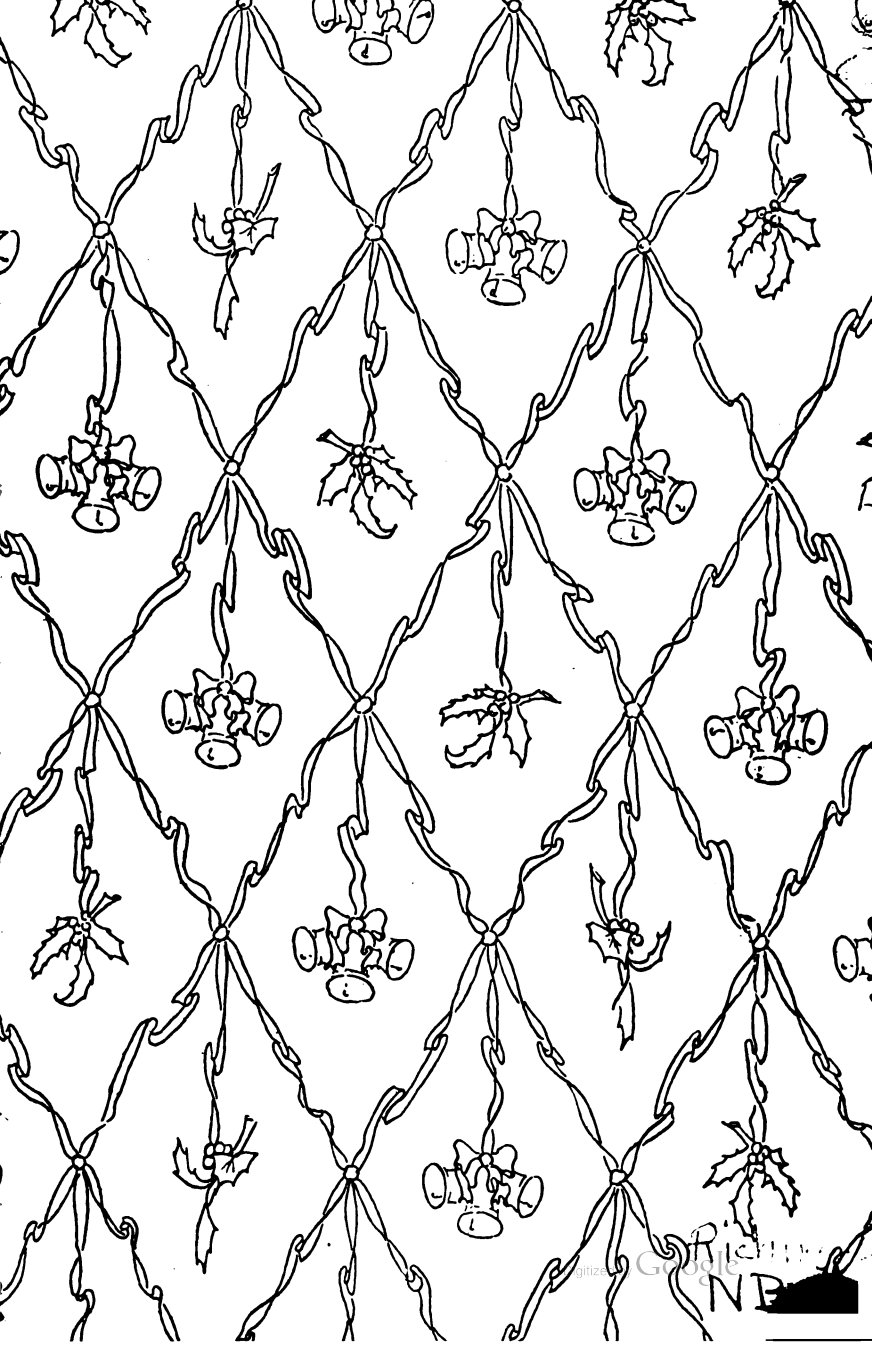


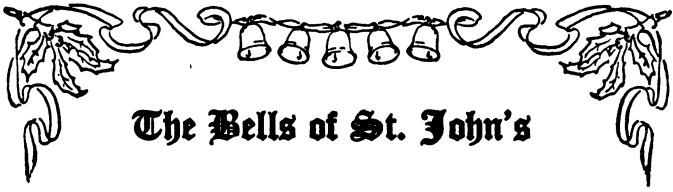
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THE BELLS OF ST JOHN'S

GRACE·S·RICHMOND





The Bells of St. John's



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“WHEN WE ROUNDED THE LAST PATCH OF SCRUB PINES
AND CAME UPON THE LONG GRAY HOUSE FAIRLY BLAZ-
ING WITH LIGHT . . . THE EFFECT WAS STUNNING”

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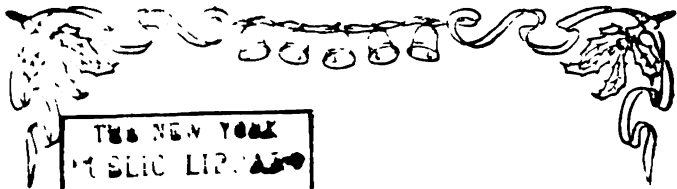
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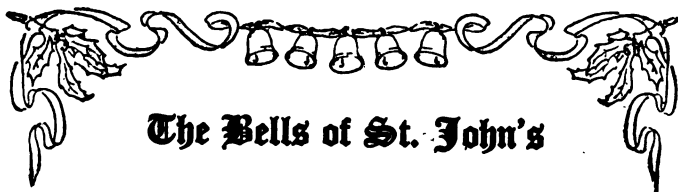


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The Bells of St. John's



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WE DIDN'T know what to do with him—and that's the truth. You see, he was to have been married on Christmas Day. And it was all off; had been off since he first came back, last April. Alicia hadn't stood by, the way we'd expected her to. That was all there was of it. Of course, he'd told her he wouldn't have her stand by, but just the same, if she'd been game, she would. We knew that—and he knew it.

It had made it darned hard for him, those first months. It's enough to come back from France with both eyes gone, and have to face just plain, every-day living, without having the

The Battle of St. Elmer's

Did you thought cared go back on you
like that. That girl! And she'd al-
ways told Miles that Christmas Day
was the greatest day in the world,
that he was born on it; and she'd said
he'd be married on it. And so, you
see, when it came around toward that
day that was the Great Day—well—
we couldn't blame him if he got blue
and blue till he was just about the
colour of the winter's sky after the
sun goes down. He'd roam around
the house, feeling his way, looking
as if all the devils were after him,
knocking things down here and there
a regular blind giant, poor old
Buddy! And I'd—well, I'd just
plain feel like a thief and a robber,
because all I'd got to show for myself
was a picayune little scar on my left
cheek and neck, where I got burned
when the plane fell. And Miles with
all kinds of a military record—and
this sort of a reward for it!

We were all dreading the Day—



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I'll say we were—when Justine came for a visit. Mother'd sent for her out of sheer desperation, thinking that if anybody could handle Miles, she could. She'd been over in France, too, and knew all about it, though she hadn't met up with either of us there, and all we knew about what she'd done, or she about our affairs, was what our respective mothers had written to each other. But she'd stayed at our house a lot, first and last, being my sister Priscilla's best friend at college, and we knew her, down to the ground. And liked her—well! Justine's a regular fellow. So to have her come to help us out with old Miles was about the best thing that could happen.

Pretty soon after she came, she cornered me. She'd been here about two days, taking observations on us, as of course we knew. I don't think we'd shown up very well, either. I suppose we were all rather nervous,



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knowing we weren't getting on as we ought to, making things go right for Miles. We didn't seem to know how. Always putting our foot in it, somehow, and making him wince. He reminded me of one of those singed black cats, wild and jumpy, that you can't get near. With the best will in the world, we couldn't get near him, or stroke him, or feed him, or do anything except make him run. Not that he didn't try to be decent with us. Lord!—you could see him trying, till you just about couldn't stand the sight.

So Justine gets me in a corner, and goes for me straight.

"Larry," she said, "what do you think Miles really dreads most about Christmas Day?"

"Why, I don't know," said I, blinking at her. She's about the best thing to look at you ever saw, though not the kind to lose your head over, because she never does the



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things that make a fellow irresponsible. She plays fair, always.

"Don't you imagine it's the sound of the church bells for early service?"

Well, of course that would be it, though none of us had thought of it. Old St. John's is just round the corner, and they'd have been married there, more than likely. We always went to early service on Christmas Day, having been brought up that way.

I agreed. But I didn't see just how we were going to avoid Miles's hearing those bells. They're the kind you do hear—big and resonant.

"Suppose we could get him off down at Grayling?" she asked me. "To spend Christmas?—and the day before and the day after?"

I whistled. "Why, Grayling's shut up, and boarded up, for the winter. And—wouldn't it be sort of dismal, down there by the rocks and the sea, anyhow? Not that it isn't great in



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summer. But it doesn't sound awfully jolly there now, to me."

"Not with big fires, and plenty of blankets, and a lot of guests?"

"Guests! Not on your life. Miles doesn't want to see a soul. Why, we've tried——"

"Suppose they were *his* guests—not yours and Priscilla's."

I shook my head. "Nobody he'd want to ask. He doesn't care to have the fellows come round at all. Very likely he *would* like to get down there—and go out and throw himself into the ocean. That's just the sort of mood he's in. Why, Justine——"

"But it's possible to open up the place, isn't it? I mean, provided he wants to go. The boards could come off—and the servants could go down—and food could be taken there."

I was pretty dubious, still. It didn't seem any kind of a plan to me.

"Do you mean, put him in the car and take him down, as a surprise,



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and find everything fixed up? If you ask me, I think he'd hate it."

"Not a bit. Give him a hand in it. Let it be his party."

"All right. Anything you say, if Mother agrees. But I don't see——"

I didn't need to see, really. I might have trusted Justine. She went off and had a conference with Mother, and another with Dad, and next day, after breakfast, I heard her tackling Miles.

"Are there many men of your outfit in town, or near here?" she asked him.

He put his hand up and lifted his black blinkers a little, the way he pretty nearly always does when anybody speaks to him—it's a nervous-looking trick. "I suppose so," he said, in that deadly dull tone he'd had since he came home.

"You haven't looked them up?"

He seemed surprised. "Why—no. I haven't kept track of anybody."



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"I went up to the Military Convalescent Hospital yesterday and ran across two who knew you. One was your old top-sergeant——"

"Not *Bim*?"

"*Bim*. *Bim* Hedges. That was the name he told me to tell his Captain—Miles Murdock. He's in a wheel-chair—likely to stay there."

"*Bim*?"

"Sergeant Hedges, Co.—Reg't——. The other man——"

"What's the matter with *Bim*?"

"He had to lose both legs—and a lot of trouble following. He may get fixed up some day so he can walk. But not yet."

Miles was staring at her. That is, he looked as if he was staring, with those black goggles trained her way. Usually he kept his head turned aside.

"How did you come to go to that hospital, first thing?" he asked. I thought there was a touch of suspicion in his voice.



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"I always go to any Army convalescent hospital, first thing," Justine told him, in a matter-of-fact sort of way. "To look up any old service men of mine. I'm always sure to find some, no matter how far from home I am. I went with my own Division and stayed by it, but replacement men came from everywhere, you know."

Justine had been with the Y—went with the first women sent over. What she hadn't seen and done—but not by *her* telling, mind you! Stuck by up to the very Front—she's got a shell scar of her own, and not a little one at that. And by the way, if anybody tries to tell you the Y didn't get to the Front, whenever it could worm its way there, you tell 'em they don't know the facts.

"Old Bim!" Miles was saying it over and over. "Why, I didn't know about Bim—thought he came through without a scratch."



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"He's quite scratched, though. And so is Chris Fiske."

"Chris Fiske! What's wrong with him?"

"He's in a wheel-chair, too. Flat. Spine injured. He's envying Hedges like everything, with only his legs gone. You see, Chris has his legs, but they're not any particular good to him, and he can never do anything but lie in that chair. Not a very jolly outlook, is it?"

You'd never think Justine was a college graduate, would you? She talks like that, just as if she couldn't get off any number of rounded periods if she wanted to. Who wants her to? Not Larry Murdock, *I'll* say. She has her Master's degree, at that—and it hasn't spoiled her a particle.

Miles seemed to be lost in thought. Justine went on, after a minute:

"I found one of my men, too—an officer—Major Annesley, though he's not in the hospital now. I was al-



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most as glad to see him as if he'd been an enlisted man, though I never much liked him. Terribly rough and gruff. He's an amputation case, too—right arm. Seeing them stirred me up to think about Christmas. It's quite near, you know—next week."

Miles nodded. I saw his lips tighten. You see, I was supposed to be writing letters, down at the other end of the library. Justine and Miles were on the big couch in front of the fire. I don't suppose he knew I was there, but she did, so I didn't feel called upon to go away. By this time I was just plain listening—probably with my fool mouth open.

"I had an idea, on the way home," Justine went on, in her straight-ahead way. I saw she wasn't going to do any more leading up, but would fire it at him now. She looked perfectly great, sitting there, with the firelight on her rather dark face—I wished he could see her. She sat looking into



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the fire, not at him. Of course, he could tell, by the sound of her voice, that her head wasn't turned toward him. He hated being watched—who wouldn't? But *I* was watching, all right.

“What if we should go down and open up Grayling two days before the twenty-fifth, and have a house party for the men we both know in hospital? Don't you think it would be wonderful, down by the sea, in December? I've always wanted to try it, and now there's a reason. Not one of those fellows has anywhere to go, and making Christmas satisfactory in a hospital is rather difficult. We might find some others of your outfit that you haven't heard of yet. Larry could hunt them up for us. What do you think?”

Well, what *could* he think? There wasn't but one answer possible, that I could see. Not *care* a hang whether Bim and Chris and Justine's Major



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had to get through the Day without their legs—and arms—and families—when he, Miles Murdock, could do something about it? What was the use of suspecting Justine of planning it all for him when she put it up to him *that way*?

They were at the list presently. It turned out that old Miles did know of three more men of his old Company who might be asked, only he hadn't been remembering much about them. I knew a couple, myself, that were bunged up enough to come under the proper head, only they were pretty lively convalescents, and could help in the entertaining. Altogether, ten men were decided upon.

"The question is," said Justine, then—and you'll say she was clever—"whether you want us to go down ahead and do it, or whether you'll come along and help. It'll take about two days' preparation, I should say. We've got to keep fires going



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all over the house, and make things look Christmas-y everywhere. Besides, there's the tree."

"Could I be of any use?" Miles asked her, doubtfully.

"Why, of course. All kinds of use, Milesy. Why not? We want to plan every detail, you know, and have it all ready to go with a whoop. Come along, please—I want you."

She had such a take-it-for-granted way of saying things, she never carried that impression of being sorry for him that a fellow hates so, when he's down. So he said he'd go, and he even looked quite a bit interested.

Well, so then we went—Mother and Pris and Justine and Miles and I, with all kinds of stuff in the big car; and cook and the house boy, Joseph, following in the little car with the trailer carrying all kinds more. Only Dad was left behind till Christmas Day, when I was to go in and collect the bunch. It was only twenty miles,



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and there hadn't been snow enough yet to make the roads heavy. But it was cold as the very dickens, and a stiff wind blowing. Mother had insisted on sending to the caretaker and having him light the first fires all over, so the house wouldn't be stone cold for Miles, but more preparation than that Justine absolutely wouldn't let her make. When we got there I mighty soon found out why.

I can see Justine yet, when we first came in, standing in the big hall that runs through the centre of the house and out to the wide porch where in the summer there's always a breeze blowing—there was one there now to make your hair curl. She had on a dark red tight little hat with black wings on it, and a great cape of black fox over her shoulders. She slung the cape onto the settle, pulled off her gloves, and threw up both arms.

"Oh, isn't this perfectly *great*?" she sung out. "Hear the breakers roar



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outside, and feel the snugness of this—when we get it in shape!”

“It doesn't feel very snug yet,” said my sister Pris, with a shiver. “The house seems cold, in spite of the fires.” And she stuck her hands in her pockets and walked about, keeping her fur coat on. “Aren't you cold, Miles?”

“Are you cold, dear?” Mother looked anxious. “Come over by the fire.” And she led him over.

He stood there, sort of humped up, warming his hands at the fire. He's a big chap, is Miles, which makes him all the more pathetic. I suppose the little blind men don't get half the sympathy the big ones do. But he didn't stay there long. Justine got hold of him and took him off upstairs to decide which rooms he wanted given to his special friends. I sneaked up after them, because I liked to hear the way she got on with him. One thing I noticed 'specially—



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she never seemed to avoid talking about things as if he could see them. The rest of us had been scared to death to do that; we'd tried to steer clear of this and that, and the more we steered the surer we were to bump into trouble. Justine simply went ahead.

"Here's this corner room," she was saying, as I came within hearing. "I always did think it the best of all, with its view over the cliffs that the others don't have. It's usually pretty windy, but it's a jolly room, don't you think?"

"First rate. The fireplace isn't drawing very well, though, is it? Isn't it smoking?"

"Just a bit. Will you fix it, while I run down for more wood?"

Of all the cool requests! I think it rather stumped Miles for a minute, but she was off after the wood, leaving him. I tip-toed into sight of him. He felt his way over, found the tongs



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—the fire-things always stood handy by in every room—and began to poke around. It took him a minute or two to find which log was standing out too far, but when he did he punched it back into place just as anybody would. I'll swear it was the first time he'd been told to do a thing for himself since he came home, if there was anybody by to do it for him. Justine came back with a basket full of stuff and I appeared from round the corner and took it in for her. And what she didn't do was to tell Miles he'd fixed the fire just right—like a good little boy! I had to laugh, though, to hear him call attention to it himself.

“Is the fire smoking now?” he asked her.

She gave it a glance. “Not a bit, since you punched it. Well, who's to be the lucky boy to have this room?”

“Bim, I think,” he said. “He'll be sure to like the view, and he won't



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mind if it isn't extra warm. Not if he's the old Bim. Of course, now——”

“I don't imagine he's much different now,” said Justine. “He sits in his wheel-chair as if he were sergeant-major of the ward, and I don't think he stands any nonsense from the other boys. There's a cock of his head and a twist of his eye——”

“That's Bim!”—Old Miles was the nearest to a grin I'd seen him.—“That's certainly Bim. I'll be glad to see——”

He stopped, and the grin faded out.

“Of course you'll be glad to see him.” Justine picked him up just like that, not blinking the word nor letting him blink it.

Well, she went ahead on those lines. What she didn't get Miles to do, one way or another, before night, can't be mentioned, and yet somehow she didn't seem to be forcing things. Mother and Priscilla couldn't quite believe their eyes.



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"Why didn't we bring him down here before?" said Pris to me, along in the afternoon, when Miles had just gone down the hall thumping his cane ahead of him, pretty nearly on a run. "It was the change he needed."

"It was the change of company he needed," I told her. "We've all been acting like so many nurses; she treats him as if he were all right. That's the dope. Who wants to be led around like a sick horse? Besides, it would brace anybody up to have Justine around. She's some girl, I'll say. Always was, but all that Army service has pointed her up. No wonder her Division howled for her when they thought they were going forward without her. No wonder they wanted her to march through the Victory Arch with 'em when they got back home. She's the only thing I ever saw that made me wish I'd been in a different branch of the Service myself."



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Pris looked at me. "Oh, how I wish I'd gone across!" she moaned. "We could work our heads off on this side—and did—but as long as we didn't serve chocolate at the Front nobody thinks we did anything!"

"You did heaps," I assured her, kindly, patting her shoulder. Pris is some little looker, too, only, of course, she isn't Justine. Couldn't be—there's only one of *her*. "But *I'll* tell you that chocolate at the Front wasn't in it with just having 'em round, those girls. We had a couple at the hut near our field who'd have put the heart into a scared rabbit—and they didn't do it with chocolate, though of course that helped. Well"—I thought it best to change the subject, Sis was looking so down in the mouth—"this room certainly does look pretty jolly, eh?"

It did. It's a jolly room anyway, long and big, full of windows opening toward the sea and the rocks, and it



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has a fireplace that'll take in a mammoth log. With a huge fire blazing all day it was plenty warm, by now, and Justine had put a lot of bright red pillows on the great gray couch and on the window seats that made the whole room look alive. I didn't know where she'd got 'em, but I found she'd had Mother busy all day covering the usual pillows and cushions with this red stuff. It did seem a pity Miles couldn't see that room.

He lay sort of curled up on the couch, tired all over, that evening, but he didn't seem so despondent as he always had before. Justine didn't pay any attention to him at all, just let him rest. We all went to bed early. There was lots to do next day, getting the tree up and trimmed. And in the evening the company was coming.

I was too busy all that next day to keep any line on Miles, though I managed to check up with Justine



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whenever I got the chance. She was everywhere. She was wearing some kind of a dark blue dress with quite a lot of that same Christmas-y red about it, and with her dark hair and the splendid colour she has, she was worth looking at. But I've got to get on with this story—can't stop to handshake with Justine all the time, much as I'd like to.

I drove back to town that afternoon and went to the hospital for Bim and Chris Fiske, and to a little flat in Blount Street for a young ex-corporal who was still suffering from the effects of his gassing and coughed most of the time. Then I picked up Justine's Major at one of the finest bachelor apartments in Wickersham Avenue—and mighty willing he looked to leave it, too. We'd arranged to have the various wheel-chairs brought out in a truck, and I managed to make my passengers all fairly comfortable, in the limmy. Dad had



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driven in for the fellows who could be crowded, so between us we had the whole batch out at Grayling by six o'clock. It was dark, of course, by that time, and a little snow was falling. There wasn't a light to be seen along the country or the shore for the final three miles, so when we rounded the last patch of scrub pines and came upon the long gray house fairly blazing with light from stem to stern, hull to hurricane deck, the effect was stunning.

Miles was in the hall, with the rest. When we carried that big Bim-chap in and put him in his wheel-chair, the first thing he looked at was Miles. In fact, his former Captain Murdock was the only one he really did look at for quite a while. You remember Bim was the one who had lost both legs and couldn't get in shape for new ones. Yet he didn't look sick, colour strong and hair the stiff kind that stands up straight, and he was in



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pretty good flesh. But Miles—well, he *did* look sick, sick in mind, you know. Lines in his face, dark shadows round his eyes, unhappiness just written all over him. As Bim looked at him Miles seemed to be all taken up with listening—as a blind man is—forgetting how he looks himself—forgetting to keep a grip on his own facial expression, so to speak. And Bim didn't say a thing, at first, just let us all shake hands with him and kept on looking at Miles. When he did speak, at last, it was because Justine had managed to get their hands together.

“Well, Captain, they sure did treat you rough,” says Bim, sort of mumbling it.

“Not half as rough as they did you, Bim,” answers Milesy-boy—and you could see him taking a brace, sort of coming-to. “Are you cold after your drive? We'll get you in here by the fire.”



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And he actually laid his hands on the back of the wheel-chair, as if he'd displace me. I was going to hang on, thinking he couldn't manage it, but I caught Justine's eye just in time and let go. And I'll be hanged if Miles didn't wheel Bim in, only bumping him a bit, here and there, Bim hanging on and chuckling all the way. It was a great sight and rather broke Miles's family up, though we all did our best to look as if watching a blind man trying to play host to a legless one and make him comfortable was an every-day treat to us.

Oh, I say, but I wish you could have seen the whole bunch by the fire that Christmas Eve! Of all the queer, happy crowds, that one left all the rest I'd ever seen by the starting-post. They'd been rather stiff and embarrassed through the dinner, even with Justine to make things go—they could hardly help it. With two men in wheel-chairs with trays, one



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blind man feeling round, several who weren't much used to silver forks—and so on—it wasn't just an ordinary party. We put it through as fast as we could, and got them back to the fire, where we knew they were more comfortable. Justine's Major was an odd duck, as she'd said, gruff and grim; and he didn't do a thing to the men but make them feel conscious of an officer's presence—an ex-officer, at that. I didn't feel much sympathy for his loss of an arm, since he kept the one he had in a position of defense, so to speak. This didn't seem the place to do that.

But when they got back to the fire the constraint began to wear off. Justine and I did a stunt or two—a song and dance—she the song and I the dance—and the fellows got really to laughing. Priscilla played some ragtime, and things were limbering up pretty well when the door opened and a tall, slim man stood there look-



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ing in, the nicest grin you ever saw spreading over his face. He wasn't wearing his uniform with the cross on the collar of the tunic, but he might as well have been, and I knew in a minute, by the roar of greeting that went up, who he was.

You see, with two or three exceptions, the men hadn't known each other at all. Bim and Chris and Miles had been in the same Company. They'd all belonged to the same Regiment, but being in different companies they hadn't been thrown together, though some had even been in the same actions at the Front. But there was one man they all knew, and that was their Regimental Chaplain. They'd been talking about him already. They'd beefed a bit about some of their officers, and disagreed about the merits of others, but there'd seemed no exception to what they thought about Jackson Warne—"Jack Warne," they called him. I



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gathered he'd covered his job pretty thoroughly, for each man spoke of him as if he knew him intimately. And I hadn't taken more than one good look at him before I understood the reason why.

He was the centre of the group in a minute, for every man who could jump up was at him, wringing his hand off, and then the whole bunch moved over to the wheel-chairs, and he sat down on the arm of Bim's, and just naturally started in to find out all about every mother's son of 'em. He wanted to know every last thing they'd tell him, and you could see his pleasant, keen-looking face just glowing with interest as they answered his questions—which extended clear to their respective futures. Miles was the only one he didn't fire any questions at, but we could see Miles listening to every word, and we could see Warne look at him pretty often. I guessed presently that Warne was



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shaping some of his talk to take Miles in, unobtrusively.

When I could I asked Justine how she'd got hold of the chaplain—for of course I knew she'd done it. I'd followed her out to the hall on a made-up errand, my curiosity on top.

"He came clear on from Chicago," she said—and her eyes were fairly shining. "It seemed to me I must have him for this, it would mean so much to the men. You see, he'd been off for months on some speaking campaign for a great Church movement, and that was why they hadn't seen him since they came back. I found out where he was and wired him, but I didn't get the answer till an hour ago, and thought I hadn't reached him. Since I had that wire from him I've been crazy with suspense, for he didn't say what train he was coming on, and I couldn't send in for him. Just the same, he'd never failed to get to his boys when they



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needed him, and wouldn't now, I was sure. And here he is—and aren't they happy to see him?"

"He looks about as happy to see them," I said, taking a look at him round the corner of the door. "He's a peach. I wish we'd had one like that with our outfit. Ours was good enough but he lacked punch. This one I should say has got the punch. Why, even that stick of a Major has cheered up a bit—looks quite human."

From that point on things went with a rush. An hour from the time Warne looked in you wouldn't have known that crowd for a lot of convalescents at all—not by their faces, anyway.

We had the tree, with all sorts of funny presents for everybody. But you can imagine all that. It's the things you can't imagine so easily that I want to tell you about.

"Chris," says the chaplain, of a sudden, "I wish we had your fiddle



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here. Would you play for us, if we had, the way you used to when we were far enough back for music?"

"Sure I would," says Chris, colouring up—he'd been pale as a ghost till that word was spoken. "But you see—I haven't."

Warne looks at Justine—who looks at me—who goes out in a hurry and comes back with the violin case she'd brought out with us and stowed in my room. I'd asked her who was going to play it, and she'd answered that she'd find the performer, and I hadn't doubted she would. Lots of fellows play the fiddle, or the piano, or the jewsharp, in any outfit you can get together.

So presently we were sitting in the firelight with all the other lights off, and Chris Fiske, with two useless legs under the rug that covered the lower part of his chair, but two perfectly good arms above it, was playing for us. He was a trifle scared



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and shaky at first, but pretty soon he forgot himself, as a real musician does, and was pouring out some mighty fine stuff. The sight of him, lying nearly flat there in his chair, with the fiddle tucked under his peaked chin, and two spots of red coming out brighter and brighter on his thin cheeks, was one to get you in the throat. It got me in mine. The chaplain looked to me as if it got him in his. I noticed we both of us took a turn up and down the room about the same time.

Well, after that had been going on a while somebody called for a song, and presently we were all singing—all but Miles. Now old Miles used to have one of the best voices you ever heard—one of those medium high tenors—not the wonder sort with upper notes that make you blink for fear the fellow's going to break under the strain—but the clear, sure, bell-like kind, that can take the air and carry it safely over a roar of bass and bari-



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tone, so that you don't really hear anything but itself—or want to. Why, Miles always used to be in demand—college glee-club, musicales, special occasions of all kinds. When he went into the Army they soon found him out and had him singing for the men. But since the sight went out of his eyes the music seemed to have gone out of his throat; in fact, none of us had ever thought of calling on him for a song. In the old days at home he was always strolling over to the piano, sitting down and pounding out his own accompaniment, while everybody stopped to listen. But now it was another story.

Yet that blamed chaplain—well, I pretty nearly wanted to hit him, when all at once, when the crowd was about breathless with yelling popular songs, and Chris's weak bow-arm had given out so that Jim Hearne had had to help out on the piano, Warne turned to Miles, who was sitting next him



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just then, and asked him to sing. Of course he didn't know—or I supposed he didn't know—that Miles hadn't been singing, and he just put it to him straight.

“We might have a Christmas song or two, now, mightn't we?” he had the nerve to suggest. “It's Christmas Eve, and I'd like to hear some of the old Christmas music. Murdock—what about ‘*O, Little Town of Bethlehem*’—and the rest of us just looking at the fire? Will you sing it for us, Captain?”

Well, it was touch and go for a minute whether that blind brother of mine would pull himself together and do the thing—or whether he'd bolt. He got up without saying a word, and began to feel his way out of the bunch. The door was nearer than the piano, and as nobody offered to lead him I thought he was pretty likely to take it as a way to escape. Justine, quick as a wink, had signalled us all to let



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him alone. He did waver a little, but then he kept straight on along the edge of the room till he got to the piano, at the farther end. Then he slid upon the bench, and sat as if he were looking at the keyboard, while the room went perfectly breathless. We were all watching him.

Pretty soon he fingered around till he found middle A, and then C below, and located the G key in the bass, and so felt his way into the chords that start the old hymn. He played along very carefully, with his foot on the soft pedal, while we waited as if we were expecting a bomb to drop in the midst of us. I stole one glance at Justine, and saw she had just about stopped breathing. As for Dad and Mother—sitting down at the same end of the room, where they had been quietly staying all evening—I didn't dare look at them at all. I found myself wondering if the dear old boy had any voice to sing with—if it hadn't



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gone with his eyes—if it wouldn't crack. . . .

Then, suddenly, he took his foot off the soft pedal and struck the opening chords with a full, sure tone. And then he began to sing.

Oh, Lord, I can't tell about it—can't describe it at all. It was a good deal as if, instead of his voice going away with his sight, his sight had gone into his voice—if you get me. The first few lines he took softly, as they ought to be taken:

O, Little Town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by—

and I couldn't be sure his voice wasn't weak with his long silence. But then he came to the next words:

Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light,
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.



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The full tones began to come out there, but it wasn't till the middle of the next stanza that we began to get the glorious, ringing ones he was capable of:

O morning stars together,
Proclaim the holy birth!

Well, I looked at the fellows then. The firelight was bright as day, but none of them realized how it showed up their faces, and they weren't trying to cover up their expressions. They'd all been mighty sorry for Miles, though they hadn't dared to show it. But now—they were showing it, all right. I don't know what my own face was like, but theirs—my word! And I should say that if you wanted to get the concentrated essence of their feeling about Miles you had only to look at Bim! That old top-sergeant without any legs under his rug—just the trunk and stumps of a man—sat



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there in his wheel-chair watching Miles, with the cockiness all gone out of him. He reminded me for all the world of a young father watching his kid son make good at some stunt he'd set him—his face all pride and happiness. And then I looked a little harder, and I saw something shiny on that tough cheek of his. I couldn't believe my eyes. I hadn't known Bim myself at all, but I *had* known other top-sergeants—you bet I had—and no soft lot they were, I'll tell the world!

I found Justine at my elbow. I'd worked myself out of the circle of firelight into the shadow at one side—it was as good as being out of the room altogether as far as the others could get any line on *my* facial expression. So when Justine seized hold of my arm and squeezed it tight I could put my other hand around and cover hers and give it a big squeeze back. I knew she was all wrought up, just as I was,



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and she had to get hold of somebody or burst.

"That blessed chaplain!" she whispered. So then I realized it was the chaplain that had turned the trick, as a man like that can, once in a while, when other people are afraid to try it.

The next thing I knew Jack Warne was on his feet, before Miles's song had more than ended, and he was beginning the old words we'd heard so often, Miles and Priscilla and I, when we were little shavers in the pew at St. John's on Christmas Eve:

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night,

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord was round about them, and they were sore afraid.

Christmas Eve! Yes, it was Christmas Eve again. A year ago most of us had been in France, waiting to come home. And two years ago every



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man had been in France, looking up at the Christmas stars and wondering if he would ever see them from the home country again. Many a man hadn't come back, but though Miles had . . . he'd never see the Christmas stars again. . . . In the shadow I took another grip of Justine's hand. Somehow it seemed to me it must be easier for him, now that he'd shown us he still could sing.

Next morning at a little before seven—and before daylight—somebody rapped at my door. It was that chaplain, Jack Warne.

"Murdock," he said, coming in and sitting down on my bed, "Miss Justine tells me that your brother Miles has been dreading Christmas Day, and she explains the reason. And she thinks that though he can't hear St. John's chimes out here he may be remembering how they sound. At about that hour we're planning to get



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out in the snow and sing some carols under the men's windows—she and you and Miles and I. All right, eh?"

"I'll say it is," and out I popped and into my clothes. So at the hour those old chimes would be ringing in the city Miles was standing out in the snow of that dark Christmas morning singing "*Noël, Noël,*"—and the rest. One by one the upper windows went up, all over the house, and then down again in a hurry, for the air was stinging cold. I don't believe Miles was thinking a thing about those chimes, though, for Justine's hand was on his arm, and the way her contralto was blending with his tenor—well, the chaplain and I kept our voices down, to hear those two, and there wasn't a bit of need of our singing at all, at all!

I don't know exactly how to tell the rest of this story. From this time on it happened like one of those rapid-fire dreams that you never quite



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catch up with. I can only give some pretty sketchy outlines, the action moved so fast. Maybe I can do it by a sort of schedule of the hours.

At seven was the carol singing, as I said.

At eight was breakfast, and Justine was putting over the jolliest kind of a party. I never saw anything like the way she got everybody going, including—if you'll believe me—her confounded, stiff-lipped Major, who actually told a story. It was rather a grim tale, and it went a bit hard to laugh at it—but you have to laugh at an officer's stories, even after the war is over, and we ha-ha-ed in great shape, same as we'd learned in the Army.

At nine o'clock Justine took me off alone, out on the big porch, with the wind blowing a hurricane, and said: "Larry, do you suppose Miles would marry me—to-day?—instead of Alicia?"



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Do you know—I don't think any shell that ever burst within range of my plane when I was over the enemy's lines ever came so near sending me to earth with a crash as that did. You see—when I was holding her hand, the evening before, it had sort of occurred to me that—— But, of course, if she felt like that about Miles, it looked as if I'd got mine at the very start.

I don't know what I said—I never shall. I have an idea that perhaps I didn't say anything—just stared at her.

“You know,” she went on, quietly, “he'll never ask anybody to marry him, now. Alicia doesn't know enough to——” There was a touch of scorn in her voice. “And since he was expecting to be married to-day, I'd like to make it possible. You see——” she didn't hesitate more than ten seconds—“I love him very much, and I'd like nothing better than to be eyes for him, if he'd let me. But—I



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don't see just how I can ask him myself. Would you be willing to do it for me?"

Well, there was another! If the first shell had come close, the second burst in my very face. Would I do it for her?

I didn't wonder Justine's men howled for her to go as far as possible toward the Front with them. A girl who was as fearless as that would be a lot of help in a crisis. And if you could have seen her, as I did, at that very minute, you'd have said even a blind man would take her, on the description. You must remember, though, that Miles *had* seen her. She wasn't the sort you'd ever forget, either.

At ten o'clock I hunted up Miles and led him to his room and closed the door. He said, "What's up, kid? I've an engagement with Bim and the chaplain this minute."

"I've something I want to say to



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you," said I, stuffing up in my throat.

"Well, hurry up and get it over," he demanded, precisely as if he wasn't blind and never had been. I hadn't heard that tone from him since he came home, and it sounded good to me. He'd been too everlasting meek to suit any of us. Now he fumbled for the door-handle and stood there looking impatient.

I remembered Justine's simple mode of attack, and took pattern from it.

"Justine wants to know if you'll marry her. . . . To-day," I added. I thought the two shells bursting together couldn't mangle him up any worse than one. Then I swallowed my Adam's apple and waited.

He backed off, and felt for something to sit down on. Anybody would. I should have put him in a chair to start with. He found a table and propped himself against it. He had gone a bit pale.



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"Don't joke about a thing like that," he said, sharply.

"I'm not joking. It's perfectly straight. She sent me to ask you. She said she couldn't ask you herself. You couldn't expect her to."

He was absolutely silent for a full minute, and he got whiter and whiter. "I don't believe it," he said, finally.

I stiffened up, naturally, and he felt it without my saying a word, and took it back.

"I mean—I don't believe she wants to," he said. "How could I believe that?"

"She said—she—loved you very much," I repeated, feeling like a fool. I'm not used to this ambassador business. "And that she'd like nothing better than to be eyes for you for the rest of your days. And you may take it from me that she said it as if she meant it. If you want to turn it down—you'll have to tell her your-



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self, I won't. Jolly! I wish she'd propose to me!"

He felt his way over to the window and stood there, as if he were looking out at the snow and the gray sea beyond. I waited, wondering how the old boy was feeling. I never had understood in the least why he cared for Alicia. Compared with Justine—well, there just wasn't any comparison, that's all.

When he finally turned round I wasn't prepared for the look of him. Maybe if he'd been told he'd get his sight back he'd have looked something like that.

"Justine refused me once," he said—and I pretty nearly jumped. "I—I think—the other—just caught me on the rebound, that was all. I did want to marry her—if I couldn't have Justine. That was unworthy, I know—but it happens to men, sometimes, you know. Now—if I might



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have Justine—— But—I can't—I oughtn't——”

“You bet you can!” I said.

At eleven o'clock I found an excuse to send Justine and Miles out for a walk together.

At twelve they came back.

At one they announced their engagement.

At two I started to drive them into town for the license. Bim went along. Without his legs and his wheel-chair he didn't take up much room; and besides, Miles wanted him.

At three we found the proper official.

At four we got back to Grayling, to find preparations for the wedding in full blast. Chris Fiske was softly practising the Wedding March with Jim Hearne at the piano. That boy was a wonder with the fiddle, and I knew the Wedding March was going to sound as it never had before. How could it help it, with a veteran of the



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World War to play it, with the ribbon, showing his possession of two military medals, on his worn old tunic?

At five we had a sort of afternoon tea by the fire, with Justine at the tea-urn, and lots of extras served. We were to have the bridal supper later on.

At six I went up with Miles to see him through his dressing. We'd brought out his clothes from the town house. He wouldn't have evening dress at all—just a brand-new tailored sack suit, such as he could wear away with him for his honeymoon. I asked him where this was to be.

"I don't know," he said. "Or care," he added. "Anywhere."

By the way he said it I knew it was the real thing with him. Anywhere—with Justine. Yes, of course—anybody'd feel like that.

"Why don't you stay here?" I asked. "We could take the fellows



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back to the town house. They know each other so well now they'd get on there well enough, and they're to leave in the morning anyway."

"That would be exactly what I'd like," he agreed, "if Justine would—and they would."

"I'll go put it up to 'em," I said—and did. They sent back word they'd gladly clear out to let him have his honeymoon here, instead of going off. As for Justine—

"Tell him I'd love it," she said. The message seemed to satisfy him.

At seven o'clock the chaplain came up and we held a rehearsal in the upper hall. Priscilla was to be maid of honour, I best man, Bim a sort of accessory after the fact. Miles insisted on having Bim's chair drawn up just beyond where I was to stand.

At eight Chris and Jim Hearne started the Wedding March. I've heard it played a good many times—ushering at weddings is an old game



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for any fellow—but I'd never had it pull the underpinning from me like it did that night. I didn't know where it was safe to look, and so didn't look anywhere, as most best men don't.

“Dearly beloved,” said the chaplain, looking like a man and a brother as he stood facing us, *“we are gathered together here in the sight of God and of these witnesses, to join together this Man and this Woman in Holy Matrimony——”*

Old Miles stood straight as an arrow—I could see him out of the corner of my eye. Beyond him I could just get the impression of Justine's white frock—it was short, a dancing dress, and there hadn't been time to make any train. Mother'd found a veil for her. On my other side I could sense Bim, old top, sitting as erect in his wheelchair as a man can. Behind us I knew the other fellows were grouped—as motley a company as wedding



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ever saw. Major Annesley from Wickersham Avenue, stiff but correct; men from Blount Street who weren't used to silver forks; the chap who had been gassed trying desperately not to cough, but not quite succeeding, and letting out a strangling sound in the middle of Justine's responses. Then—

"Whom God hath joined together"—

After that a sort of blur of things. We had a great old supper, and then Chris struck up a dancing tune and we saw Miles bending before Justine.

"Will you dance?" he said. And she got up, the stunningest bride you ever saw, and he walked off with her, before us all. We cleared the floor for him in a jiffy, and if Justine guided him a bit he was too full of bliss to know it. All the candles—and there were dozens of them—seemed to be 'specially shining on them as they danced.

"I don't think I ever saw a happier pair," said the chaplain in my ear, as



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they stopped near us. "What, is she going to dance with them all? She'll have to, if she begins it. And no whistle for cutting in, either. They won't stand for that."

She did dance with every man-jack of us who could twirl his toes, and even offered to dance with the chaplain, to end all.

"I don't know how," he frankly confessed—looking as if he regretted it, too—"but I'll walk down the room with you to the piano, if you and Miles and Larry and I may sing what I want, before we leave you here together."

Of course it was "Holy Night" he wanted—there couldn't be any other way of ending Christmas Day, from a chaplain's point of view. Not that there could have been a better one, I'll admit that. And at the end of the song he had to have one more word—being a chaplain—and the real thing, at that.



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The room was still as sleep while he said the words—somehow I can't forget them—the Collect for Christmas Day, that Miles and Pris and I had learned when we were children, and learned better than any other because it was Miles's birthday Collect, too:

“Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.”

I looked at Miles. Did he hear the bells of St. John's? I wonder.

THE END



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